

# Clyn D. Barrus

## History



Brigham Young University School of Music  
Professor of Viola, Instrumental conducting 1985-99  
First Director, BYU School of Music

## **An Interview with Dr Clyn Barrus, Chair BYU Department of Music**

**August 8, 1996**

I am Clyn Barrus and am chairman of the department of music, this fall it will be made a school of music and the title I will have will be director. I also have a responsibility working with the orchestra program at BYU and from an academic standpoint; I work primarily from the string department.

### **Who are effective teachers and why do you think of them as effective?**

Well I look at those who had an impact on my own personal life and I think there were a number of things that were very important. One is that they themselves had an incredible knowledge of what they were teaching. They were not only able to demonstrate that knowledge, but throughout the time they were working they had also been acknowledged by others as being outstanding in their field. The other is that they had the ability to demonstrate their knowledge to their students. This happened through their own music or ways of explaining. I myself was extremely appreciative of their ability to explain what they knew. Some teachers are very fine performers, but they don't have the ability to express and teach that knowledge to their students. So they were able to demonstrate what they were able to do professionally. The other thing was their ability to help me recognize within my own self what my unique potential was. If I could understand and see that, then I could achieve the potential that I personally had. The other was a form of love - A love towards me as a student, but also a love toward their art of music. They had an

abiding love for music on top of playing and performing well.

### **What criteria would you use in evaluating other teachers?**

Well, I feel that the criteria would be very similar to that which I have just explained to you. As the department chair here at BYU I also have another element that comes into the picture and that is the element of the gospel of Jesus Christ. This is a university that openly professes their belief in Jesus Christ. We have the opportunity to bring that spiritual aspect into our classes. So on top of what I've mentioned, I would have to evaluate spirituality. I think that is really important in music, because music is an expression of what we are. What we are spiritually, personally, and emotionally. I think that is why as a department we are able to exist, because there are many fine music programs in this country and the world of course. What we offer that nobody else does that I'm aware of is that spirituality. What music means in relation to ourselves and others, but also what it means in relation to the gospel and what we are spiritually.

### **What can a teacher do to make the most difference in a student's learning?**

All of the aspects I have already touched upon. Also the teacher has to have an incredible knowledge on what they are trying to teach. The knowledge is something that is always ongoing, especially here in the music. You have to constantly work at and perfect those elements. The other is teaching skills. There

are definitely skills that have to be obtained for someone to be able to teach effectively. In our own department we spend a great deal of time teaching the students the art of teaching, and it truly is an art. Also demonstrating your love for what you are doing. Especially with music, it is so emotional. Also show the students what their potential is. A teacher who lifts their students and recognizes their potential is a teacher that is terrific.

**What sort of preparation needs to go into teaching, and do you feel that the level of teaching here is equal to that quality of students that are being admitted?**

Well, I certainly would agree with the quality of students being admitted. In addition to the normal university requirements for admissions, we have another element and that is performance and quality was musicians. I have no doubts about the quality of our music programs. We have over 720 majors which puts us in the top ten of largest schools in the country. I wish I could say all faculty members were equally prepared. Some are definitely better prepared than others. For the most part it is very successful. I think our students graduate with a very keen sense of ability, of the technical requirements, and for the most part are very competitive when they leave BYU. Music is a very competitive field.

**When you go into a class, what do you expect the students' role to be in that class?**

There are a number of things I would say a student should come to class with. One is a desire to learn, and I wouldn't say that every student does that. Sometimes it takes a process for the student to open up themselves to learning. Once they have opened up themselves to the process of learning, they

must be open to observing. They have to observe what the teacher is giving them, and how it is done. Once they have observed, then the element of practice or study. After they have practiced, they need to come back to the teacher and demonstrate what they have learned. That cycle is very important. The work of the student is very open. They perform for a wide range of audiences. They continually have to demonstrate where they are at. When a teacher notices a lack of progress it is important to tell the student and help them realize what they need to do. I believe everyone has a dream of excelling and it is our job as teachers to help the student realize what can be done. If we can help them realize their potential then that is the greatest thing for a teacher to be able to accomplish.

**How does the structure of BYU affect your teaching?**

I can't imagine a more beautiful circumstance for music than here at BYU. I believe in a general education type of education for our music students. That's what I call feeling the earth. I think the spiritual aspect is also something very important to feel of the heavens. If I had to describe a place where music could thrive at its very best I would develop a department very similar to what BYU has. I think it's wonderful here.

**What teaching methods have you found to be effective with large groups?**

It is very interesting in music to be able to work with large groups of people. An indication of how you're doing is greatly determined by the audience who comes and listens. You are on the stage all the time. You are constantly demonstrating the art of teaching and learning. The conductor must

have an absolute knowledge of what he is doing. He must be prepared in every way. The next step is being able to impart upon your students what you have already learned. It has to be done very quickly. Everything has to be planned out already. I feel one of the most important things is the interpretation of the music. Music is the expression of the soul. The conductor must understand the composer's intent and then impart that upon the students. He must make sure the entire group is unified in its expression. Inspiration is very important. You do pray about it, you do seek insight. It is a great challenge.

**What teaching methods to improve scholarship have you tried, and what would you like to try?**

I am primarily involved in performance; my research is more involved in doing more performing. A performer constantly has to put himself in the position where he has to perform. You can't simply stop. You must constantly be learning and studying new

repertoire. I also feel it is important to be involved in legitimate research. One needs to research, study, and write on. If you haven't studied you have no backing for your performance.

**What are the intrinsic rewards you have received from teaching?**

As we get older it is such a joy to find the things that mean so much to us. The arts are particularly vulnerable to change. Thank goodness there is the great art -- the art that still speaks to and says something to people. It is a great joy to have those things given to me by others which I hold dearly, it is a great joy to pass them onto others. That to me is so important. To see that which I dearly love, passed onto others. I hope there will always be people who look at the art of music and realize that it is worth passing on. If those people ever stop, then our art would be lost.



# Marilyn Barrus Bradshaw

Interview with Mike Ohman  
June 30, 2008

**I don't know anyone who was more loving and compassionate as Clyn. One always left his office with a hug. That is just how he was. He was such a caring person.**

That's why it was so hard for me to lose him. It was because of his ability to love.

**Can you share with us a little bit about Clyn's background?**

When he was a junior in high school he was encouraged to try out for a scholarship at Curtis Institute in Philadelphia. He won, and decided to attend there. He spent three years studying before he felt impressed to serve a mission. That was a hard decision because Curtis wouldn't allow Clyn to graduate if he took two years off for a mission. President David O. McKay wrote a personal letter encouraging Clyn to serve a mission, so he decided to go. He served faithfully in Austria and was greatly blessed for his righteous decisions.

He liked Austria so much that after returning home from his mission, he married me, and then we moved to Vienna. It was there that he graduated from the Vienna Academy of Music. We remained in Vienna for 3 years. During that time he played viola in the Vienna Symphony. We had two children while living there, and had a choice to make. We decided that we didn't want to raise our family there and ultimately returned back to the states.



Clyn felt it very important to obtain a doctorate. We returned to the states where he graduated from University of Michigan. After that, he taught at and played in the string quartet at University of Illinois for 3 years. Following his time there, we moved to Minnesota. There he began as co-principal violist and later the principal violist at the University of Minnesota. He also played in a quartet, and was the conductor for the Minnesota City Orchestra.



### **What brought him to BYU?**

Something just felt right about BYU. Something just pulled us. We felt very good about it. He first started working here in 1985. He was the conductor of the orchestra, a viola instructor, and taught music literature classes. He instantly bonded with the students and other faculty members. One of the big things he loved about BYU was incorporating the gospel into music. That's something truly unique to BYU.

### **After awhile he became involved in administration, can you share with us a little about that?**

He was a natural leader, a visionary man. He had such a love for other people. He was concerned with how everyone was doing. He believed that music training plus the gospel produced something incomprehensible. A combination that was very valuable. He became chairman of the music department in 1992 and raised the stature. He felt that the purpose of music was to form good relationships with God and others. Through music one could strengthen their conviction of the truthfulness of the restored gospel of Jesus Christ. He was also the first director of the School of Music.



### **Who were some of the other faculty at BYU during that time?**

Newell Dayley, Jim Mason, David Dalton, Barbara Williams, Julie Bevan, Percy Kalt.

**I remember Clyn doing a viola solo once without accompaniment. He performed the hymn “Oh My Father” and brought the audience to tears. It wasn’t just in his perfect performance of the notes, but the spirit in which he performed it. He had such an aura of humility that emanated from him.**

### **What was important to him, what were some of his goals?**

He contemplated the question of the role of music in the church. This idea goes back to the prophesy of John Taylor’s time that the church was to make music that would be acclaimed throughout the world. His goal was to mix professionalism with the gospel equally. That’s what Clyn loved about BYU. Most important to him however was the person, not the objective. He was so concerned about everyone with whom he was associated.

### **What were the facilities like?**

Well they were probably not too different than they are now. I do remember however that for Clyn, the department made two small offices into one larger one. There were two small offices separated by a partition, so they tore down the partition to give him more room for viola and ensemble rehearsals.

### **Can you tell us anything about his creative side?**

He was a creative genius. He had the ability to dream of things. He would often build stuff around the house. He would obtain a book teaching him what he needed to do, and then he’d build it. If it didn’t turn out right, he’d tear it down and start over. He even made a



beautiful bed out of pine for our cabin. He always kept himself busy.

**Clyn had many different careers during his life. He had his educational career as a student; he was a viola performer, a conductor, an educator- a fine teacher, an administrator, active in the church, and also a great family man.**



**When he started getting sick, was there anything he regretted not being able to accomplish?**

He only wanted to come back to BYU. When he finally realized that he was really sick, all he wanted was to come back. The doctor said that it was very rare that anyone in his

condition would live past a year. This was discouraging for Clyn, and he had a hard time dealing with it. In 1997, right before he passed away, he conducted a final performance of the Nutcracker. He had a really difficult time during the performance. He even lost his place, something that had never happened before. After that final diagnosis he only lived for 6 months.

**He was unique in so many ways. He was unique in education, performance, humility, and how he reached into the hearts of people.**

His family was very loving. His mother was an organist at BYU-Idaho (Dr. Ruth Barrus). She had such a desire for excellence, and was a very spiritual woman. I took a Book of Mormon class from her at BYU-Idaho and loved the experience. His sister and brother are fine musicians as well.

**We appreciate your tender response in talking to us, Marilyn. Thank you.**

Everything that has happened has been according to the Lord's will. He had such a deep love for his colleagues here.



**Mike and Marilyn**



